

TRAPPED IN IMPERMANENCE: MAKING ARCHITECTURAL MODIFICATIONS TO IDP CAMP SHELTERS AS A SELF-SETTLEMENT STRATEGY

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The upheaval of forced displacement and the more arduous task of resettlement have been known to give rise to a whole spectrum of unprecedented problems and challenges, for all actors involved. Although forced displacements have constantly been on the increase due to the increase of factors such as conflicts, natural disasters and even massive development projects. Yet, each case regardless of its cause or location needs to be handled using strategies that are situation and culture-specific to enhance a resettlement scheme that is holistic. However, where a government initiated resettlement programme is not forthcoming, strategies for self-settlement are often adopted.

The study is spurred from a ruling given by the International Court of Justice in 2003, in which the peninsula on the eastern border of Nigeria was ceded to Cameroon. This secession affected most of the fishing communities that had originally inhabited the region referred to as the Bakassi Peninsula, inciting many to forcefully relocate away from the region. The result of this action was the permanent displacement of an estimated 10,000 people, most of whom were migrant fishermen of the Ijaw ethnic origin.

Although the resettlement of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) is a direct

responsibility of the government of Nigeria, the emergency management agency was ill-prepared to handle such situations of mass displacement. As such, the IDPs were placed in government built transit camps with poor, unhygienic conditions and lacking basic sanitary facilities as well as other infrastructure. The transit camp which later became referred to as the "Returnee camp" was originally intended for short stay until a more permanent solution, such as resettlement housing or cash compensation would be provided.

Three years on, and what was intended as a temporary facility to shelter the displaced migrant fishermen, is fast becoming a permanent squatter settlement in the heart of the city, as families continually adapt the buildings to suit their needs. The proposed resettlement housing scheme has been abandoned and the option of compensation is locked in bureaucratic stalemate. With no foreseeable resettlement plan, the IDPs have developed several self-settlement strategies to create income and cope with the challenges of urban housing amidst growing families. One of such strategies involves making alterations to improve the livability of the environment and the impermanent shelters, which they find themselves now trapped in.

This paper explores how architectural modifications have been made to the camp shelters and the immediate environment to improve livability, over a three year period. It also examines the influences of original vernacular built forms of the migrant fishermen on the architectural modifications made to these shelters in the IDP camp.

The phrase "Trapped in impermanence" is borrowed from Goswani's (2006) thoughts on the state in which IDPs lived along the national highway 31, in Western Assam, India.

Keywords:

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*IDPs; Self- Settlement; Migrant fishermen;
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